

FIVE SHORT SERMONS

FOR

POOR PEOPLE;

IN WHICH THE

DOCTRINES OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

ARE STATED AND ILLUSTRATED:

THE LAST CHIEFLY INTENDED AS

A GUARD AGAINST THE PERNICIOUS PRINCIPLES

OF

Mr. THOMAS PAINE.

BY THE

REV. P. OLIVER, M. A.

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If Jesus Christ were now on earth, preaching in our streets, and praying and singing psalms in private houses, how would he be looked on by the generality?—What would you think of Him?—Should you not be ashamed of being His follower?

Hear then what Christ himself says—He that is ashamed of me, and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with the holy angels. MARK 8, 38.

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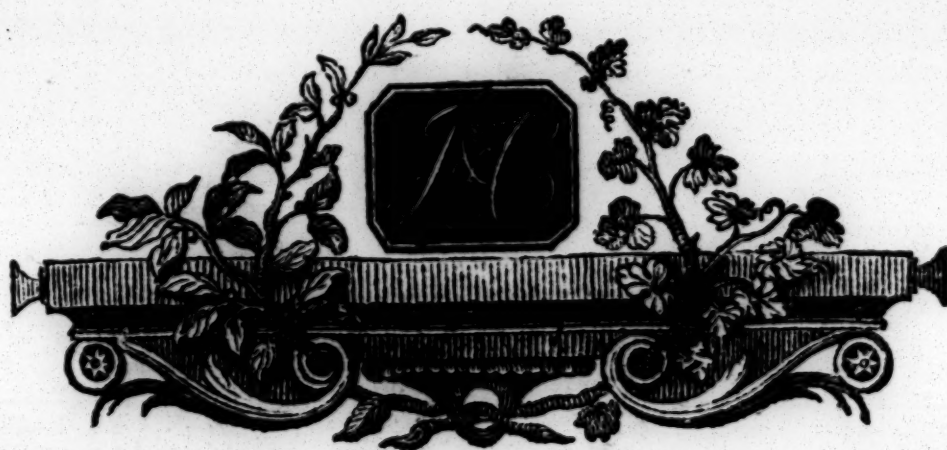
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SERMON I.

ACTS XXIV, 14.

But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy so worship I the God of my fathers.

WHILE Paul lived after the custom of the world about him, and believed and taught as they would have him, he was beloved and esteemed by the Chief Priests and people; but when the Spirit of God convinced him he was a sinner, undone, and with "no health in him, and that in Christ alone he could find salvation;" and, in consequence of this change in his views, when he began to teach accordingly, he was then no longer loved or esteemed, but was accounted mad and a perverter of the people, though he only taught that which Moses and all the Prophets taught before him. Thus now while a clergyman preaches good works, as the way of man's acceptance with God, he is well approved, but when he comes to teach what the Articles of our church teach, which we all engage to observe, then he is ranked as Paul is here—as an heretic.

It is of great moment, therefore, you should know what the church really is. For a church means not a building of wood or stone, else St. Paul would never have said, salute the church that was in a particular house (*Col. 4. 15*) for he never would have desired them to salute a building; nor could such a building have been contained in a dwelling-house.

A church then is a number of people professing the principles of Christ. Some churches differ from others in outward discipline; some in points of doctrine. Now what the church of England is may be known by the Liturgy and Articles.

The first great truth it teaches is, that "we have left undone what we ought to have done, &c. and have no health in us." And if you will read the ninth Article you will find how we come to this sad condition, "by the fall of our first parents, whereby man is far gone from original righteousness in which he was created, and is in his own nature inclined to evil;" and that this is the fault and corruption of every man.

Thus the Bible teaches us that Adam begat a son in his own likeness (not in God's likeness, in which he himself was created) and that hence all being corrupt, death hath passed on all, not only a death of the body, but a death of the soul; a deprivation of all life and all love to God; hence baptism and circumcision were appointed, both to teach the same thing, the one, by the spilling of blood, teaching that our lives were forfeited, and that by the blood of Christ spilt for us we can only be saved. The other, viz. baptism, that were such as never have actually committed sins, yet have need to be washed by the blood of Christ, and renewed by the Holy Ghost, which are signified by the baptism of infants.

This then must be known and felt, as our church teaches, before ever we can be truly Christians; we must feel in our hearts what we have said with our lips, that "we have no health in us." Have you ever felt this?

Have you ever thought of those solemn words you have so often repeated at church? Have you ever considered the consequence of such a condition lived and died in? Alas! how many frequent our churches who think they have been very good people, and have had very good hearts all their life long.

Consider this; and consider your life past, and your heart; the uncleanness you have indulged in thought and desire, if not in practice; the lasciviousness, the envy you have felt towards your neighbour; the covetousness after this world's good, and the carelessness after God's favour, and you will soon find that our church and the Bible are right which tell you you are a poor helpless sinner.

Now let me ask you, is a clergyman right who (having just before confessed that he and you are miserable sinners) in a few minutes after gets into the pulpit and contradicts all that you have said, and tells you that you are very safe, and satisfies you that you have a good heart, and a very good person? And that only a few who are guilty of outward sins are in any danger of God's wrath?

On the other hand, is a clergyman to be accounted a Methodist who teaches what he has solemnly engaged, "that the heart of man is desperately wicked, and that all have sinned and come short of what God requires of us," "that our very nature is corrupt, and that unless we be changed, and our sins pardoned, we never can see the kingdom of God?"

You say, perhaps, you have been brought up to the church, and you will not change your religion. I am sure I would not wish any man to change from the principles of the church of England; I think them the purest that can be, but are you not in fact averse to them? * And, as Paul was once, thinking you do God service when you dislike all those who love and approve them?

SERMON II.

ACTS XXIV, 14.

But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and the Prophets.

A MAN must know the fall by Adam before he can know the way of recovery by Christ: He must feel he is a sinner before he will desire a Saviour.

* So averse are many who think themselves very good church people, that though a man spends the Sabbath in idle visits, in settling weekly accounts, or even in drunkenness, he shall be esteemed a well-meaning, good sort of man, especially if he sometimes appear at church; but if he is awakened to his soul's worth, leaves off his evil courses, and goes to hear where the Articles are preached, he shall be presently abused and vilified.

These two points well understood are a key to the whole Bible. Look then on all the miseries in the world; the cries and groans of the sick and dying; all the sorrows and griefs which afflict the heart of man, and then think, this the Bible tells me is the wages of sin, and yet but a little part when compared with the torment those souls shall suffer that shall lie for ever in the bottomless pit of fire in infinite misery.

Study well the fall of man, and all its sad consequences in yourself and in others; see how little love for Christ there is in the world; how that his very name in most companies is a terror and hated to be heard of; see how much covetousness, lust, and ill-will govern in men; and look into your heart, and then, when you have felt the need, you will see the necessity of such a Saviour as Jesus Christ. Now in the eleventh Article our church teaches us that we are accounted righteous only for the merit of our Lord Jesus Christ, by faith, and not for our merits or deservings; that no good-works of ours can possibly suffice to answer what we owe either for past or to come; for the past you know, if I owe a sum of money to any one, though I run no more in debt, it will not pay what I owe already. So my being sorry for having sinned, and doing so no more (though right in their place) yet will not make amends for what is past. Hence I need the payment which Christ made on the cross for sin, by his death; and to make me accepted, I need his perfect righteousness or obedience to God's holy law to be accounted to me; that as "by the disobedience of one many became sinners, so by the obedience of one many should be made righteous." Thus Isaiah says, our best righteousnesses are as filthy rags, *Isaiah* 64, 6.

Now if the best works of so holy a man as Isaiah were but as filthy rags, what must the evil works, the sinful desires of such an one as you or I be? So Job says, I abhor myself and repent. So Paul says, "Not having mine own righteousness (to depend on) which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith;" "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death." (*Phil.* 3, 9, 10)

Thus when a man hath really experienced what our Catechism calls the inward and spiritual grace, of which water is the outward sign in baptism,* viz. a death unto sin, and a new birth unto righteousness, through faith in Jesus Christ, then he can come and truly say, what often many say falsely at the Sacrament, "that they come not trusting in their own righteousness; and as they found peace by Christ at first, so they feed by faith on his body and blood, shed and broken for them, and offered in the Sacrament to them." And thus the Sacrament teaches that our spiritual life is to be supported by Christ as it was begun by him. Now by doing this aright we confess we owe all our hope to that sacrifice once made on the cross, and that by this our souls are nourished as our bodies are by the bread and wine.

* The rite of confirmation (which comes between baptism and the receiving of the Sacrament) if used according to its original intention, would be of much benefit; namely, if children were instructed every Sunday after service by the minister, and when they gave good reason to hope they had felt in their hearts, and practised in their lives, the principles of our Catechism, &c. then to be publicly confirmed in them. As it is, what are children confirmed in general in but ignorance? Carelessness about their souls, and profaneness? Many parents act as if the Bishop laying on his hands had a sort of magic influence; and if their children can but procure the ticket from the clergyman of the parish, all is, they think, well.

Search now and examine your heart. Have you ever seen its depravity? Its unbelief? Your need of a Saviour? And have you seen enough in Jesus Christ to save you to the uttermost from the guilt and power of sin? When you have come to the Sacrament have you come trusting only on Him? Renouncing all your good works as means to procure you God's favour? Or are you not trusting perhaps even to a slight preparation of a week before?

Oh think, poor soul! whoever you are, how short your life here must be, how very short it may be, perhaps not another year, or week, or perhaps not one more day, and then what is thy condition for ever? Are you not living in the love of the world, in open sin, or in heart sin? Are you not seeking God's favour by some other way than by Christ alone? Be sure then your condition is deplorable; for as he who believeth in the Son of God, resteth wholly on him, hath eternal life, so he who seeks to establish any other way of obtaining God's favour, "the wrath of God abideth on him for ever." (*John 3, 36*)

SERMON III.

HEBREWS xi, 7.

By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.

AMONG other histories which God has recorded for our instruction in his word, is the story of Noah. He lived at a time when (as in our days) few cared for their souls, but made a jest of all who did.

All flesh had corrupted "his way upon the earth," (*Gen. 6, 12*) which probably means the way of salvation by Jesus Christ, God's only way of saving sinners; and they had, in consequence, fallen into all manner of outward careless living and profaneness.

At this time God tells Noah (who feared and loved God) that he would destroy the world by a flood; and bids him to provide an ark wherein to save himself and his house; thus Noah was warned of God.

Now this was a type or pattern of God's dealing with us in these days. We see the wickedness of men is very great; the Sabbath is made a day of pleasure and idleness; God's word is neglected, and above all, Jesus Christ is despised, and all who love him, so that men will not bear to hear his blessed name mentioned in any company, but they call it enthusiasm and melancholy. Now God tells us in his word, that he will bring a flood of fire on the world, and that all who live and die in their sins, unrepented of, shall be swallowed up everlastingly, and suffer the vengeance of eternal fire.

The world that heard God's message to Noah, we have reason to think, laughed at it and scorned it. What (might they probably say) would God make so many millions to drown them only because they are not so precise as this enthusiast Noah is? And curse us only for indulging in a few innocent pleasures? And for not believing just as he does? What! are all our learned priests and wise men wrong, and Noah only right? It cannot be so, God is too merciful to do thus, let him mind his own business and not meddle with us.

Even thus we see it is now; all are eager to buy, to sell, to eat and to drink, to marry and to be given in marriage, that is, these things take up so much of men's thoughts, that they think nothing of Jesus Christ, and of their own souls; and thus, by their actions, prove that they do not believe what God tells them of the worth of Christ and of their souls, or else they would not be so careless about them as they are.

Now how is this with you? Are you not guilty of neglecting Jesus Christ? Are you pleased to hear of him? Or vexed or angry? Do you not love to spend his Sabbath in idle pleasures instead of hearing his word and calling on him? Be assured if you loved Christ you would think of him in your heart, and what a man loves to think of he is glad to talk about.

Well, what did Noah? He believed what God told him; was fully persuaded that God was no liar, but that he would do what he said he would.

Now this persuasion, that what God said was true, brought him through all his difficulties, and many he had no doubt. To build such a huge ark he must have been at a great expence, though his estate was very large when he began, yet before he had done it must be nearly gone, if not altogether. His unbelief like enough often suggested, what if all your fears are but fancy? Is it likely all your good and moral neighbours must perish for ever? And only this way of yours be right? Possibly his wife, his children, and friends, often dissuaded him from going so far; that they should all be ruined and laughed at, and all his ungodly neighbours, when for one hundred and twenty years they saw and heard of his undertaking, had many a grave sneer and jest at the work and the workman. Yet you see what carried him through all, he was persuaded what God said must be true. Now unless you and I have this persuasion, the difficulties, the sneers, the trials we shall meet with, will surely keep us from Jesus Christ, and a godly life, and cause us to give over all religion. Noah had often to stop his ears to enemies and friends, to wife and children, and listen only to God. Yea he had to stop his ears against his own foolish reasonings, for had he began to reason, where shall all this water come from? *Can all our philosophers be wrong? Surely God is more merciful?* He had never gone on; but he believed God, and this set him on his work, and kept him to it; and thus faith in God's word is the only source of good works, and will only keep us to them, as you may see in the eleventh and thirteenth Articles of our church.

Remember then, if you will come to Christ, you must not heed what any can say against him, nor what your own heart says, if all the friends in the world hate you for it. Go to him, and live godly for his sake; it will soon be over. Noah had one hundred and twenty years to be laughed at; but in one, or two, or ten, or twenty, or a little more, you and yours, those that hate and those that love you, will be either in heaven or hell for ever; with Christ in bliss, or with the cursed spirits in flames! Oh! think on this, poor soul! think well where you are going—consider your life past—

compare it with God's word—remember your time is short—flee from the wrath to come to the sure ark of safety Jesus Christ; and then when the waves of fire cover the world, you shall be in safety, as Noah was in the ark when the water drowned all who were out of it.

SERMON IV.

2 KINGS V, 14.

Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the Man of God; and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

ALL the Bible has some view to Jesus Christ; hardly the name of a river, city, or person, in the Old Testament, but alludes to him; hardly a history but had some reference to him, or to his work, on a sinner's heart.

We read in this chapter, of Naaman, that he was a great captain, and had all this world could give him, but that he was afflicted with a loathsome disease, he was a leper. This may teach us that all in this life have some sorrow either of mind, or in their outward circumstances; if you are poor then do not envy the rich; you know not what they have to balance their riches, but make sure of Jesus Christ, and you are as rich a man as the world has in it.

But this teaches us especially the evil of sin; if all the king's favours, and all the victories he had won, left Naaman in such a sad case that after all that could be said of him, this ruined all—"but he was a leper." Then think "what will it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" What profit is it if I enjoy health, and strength, and riches, and the favour of men, and all that my heart can wish, if it can be said of me, but he is an unpardoned sinner, he is without Christ, without God. Alas! then, after a few Summers and Winters are over, I must leave all for ever, and go to the cold grave; and then, what then? Why then the same infallible truth which says, it is appointed for men once to die; says likewise, that after death is the judgment, and then I am doomed and sentenced, "Go ye cursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." Is this my case? Am I living in sin? Despising holiness? And neglecting Christ? Oh! let me think I am not yet in everlasting burning. I may be as a brand plucked out of the fire. Well, what means did God use to save this great Syrian? Did he send some great, and rich, and learned man to be the instrument of his salvation? No, he so ordered it that the Syrians, when they came into the land of Israel, took captive a little maid; little, perhaps, in the world's eye, as to her rank and station, and perhaps in years. Let this encourage you parents who know Christ

yourself to instruct your children diligently as to what Christ did, and who he is; God over all, and yet a poor despised man; you know not what God may do by the poorest child you have.

Well she tells, after her ability, where he may be cured, and attention is paid to her advice. It is a happy thing to have godly servants, and for a master to be humble enough to listen to their councils.

Naaman, after some time, comes to Eliha, but he was full of self-importance though a poor leper; he expected the Prophet to come out to him, and probably by some magic words to have done the cure. Thus when a sinner comes to Christ, he is full of his own method of cure; he hopes to bring somewhat of his own good doings with him; that he has not been so bad as some have been, and though sensible of the pain of sin, yet often he will go away, as Naaman did, for a season. The Prophet, instead of doing as he expected, bids him go wash in Jordan seven times. This mortified his pride: Are not (said he) the waters of Abana and Pharpar better than all the waters of Israel? May I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned, and went away in a rage. Thus when a man (who all his life has been full of the fond conceit that by his own good works, or holiness, God's favour is to be procured) hears the humbling words of the Bible, "that except a man be born again he cannot see (form any conception of or ever enjoy) the kingdom of heaven;" presently he is offended, and turns away. What says his heart? Are all alike? All to be changed or never saved? All to be saved too by the atonement and righteousness of another, and not by their own? Naaman is a true picture of such a one. Hence the Gospel is hated and despised, and all who profess it; for as it was in the beginning so it is now; "he that was born after the flesh persecuteth him that was born after the spirit." Now, consider, have not you and I felt this anger in our hearts against this truth of God's word, salvation by Christ alone? What says our reason to it? What says the world to it? All enthusiasm! Yet we have seen what the Scripture says, and what our church says. Well Naaman's servants were wiser than their master: Teaching us to pray for such as oppose themselves and hate us. Who knows what God may do for them? Thus when you see any one who hates these truths of God, do not hate them, but pray for them. Naaman at length submits, washes seven times in Jordan, and the blessed effects were, his flesh came again as the flesh of a little child, and he was whole. Thus when a sinner is brought to submit to God's method of saving sinners by Christ alone, these blessed effects surely follow; he will be a new creature, he will have a new object of affection, a crucified and once despised Saviour: He will love to pray to him, and to praise him, and to speak of him, and to live for him. Do you know any thing of this? Are you thus a new creature? Naaman came back to the Prophet with love, whom he left in rage. So when we love Christ we shall love those whom we once hated, because they had too much religion for us before. He worshipped God when he came home, acknowledged the true and only Saviour. Now do you do this? Have you prayers in your family? Do you confess and own Christ in your life and conduct? Are you honest in your dealings? Sober and chaste in your conversation? Are you as one separated from the world for Jesus Christ? Then you are a happy soul! May he who saved Naaman go on with his work in you more and more to his own great praise, and your everlasting comfort. *Amen.*

SERMON V.

LUKE 16, 31.

And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.

WE have in this parable an account of a rich man, his life on earth, his death, and what followed after. May the Holy Spirit give you and me to profit by what is here written for our instruction.

Our Lord tells us, in the first place, that he was clothed with purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day. In proportion as men are careless about their souls, and what shall become of them when they die, in that degree commonly they are anxious to have as much pleasure here as they can. Were the rich to know the value of Jesus Christ, and the worth of their neglected souls, they would be more concerned about them than they are. The cares of most are like this unhappy man's; to contrive what they shall eat, and what they shall drink, and wherewithal they shall be clothed; as for any thing more they esteem it enthusiasm. We may see how little men called Christians truly believe the Bible; else they would not be so greedy for riches and honours for themselves and their children as they are if they believed what the Scripture says of the danger of riches: Who, that was escaping for his life from the jaws of a fierce lion, would wish to be loaded with great weights in his race? Oh! seek Christ, who will be riches and joy to you and yours when you are shut up in your coffin and carried to your grave. Yet most envy such an one as Dives, looking but at his outward fare; clothed splendidly, living sumptuously. Are not most grasping after such a condition?

On the other hand, our Lord tells us of a poor beggar, who was laid at his gate, full of sores. He was laid, probably he could not walk himself there, and the crumbs which fell from the table of the rich man, and which his dogs eat, would have contented him.

How many in our land take more care for, and spend more money in feeding their dogs or their horses, than they do in comforting their fellow-creatures; and what if possible is worse, how many labouring men spend in drunkenness what their wives and children want for food and cloathing.

Well, this poor man had Jesus Christ in his heart, and his case was soon changed, and all was well with him. Better have all sorrow of this world with Christ, than all riches and greatness without him.

It is like enough this rich man had many a merry jest upon religion, and all that were fools enough to care for their souls (for we find when in torment, he acknowledges his unbelief of what the Bible told him) cursed them, possibly, as a parcel of Methodists and hypocrites; and, not unlikely, he knew this poor beggar was one of this sort, and, therefore, neglected him;

for this is the way of many rich, Oh if you are so very religious, you may seek elsewhere than from me, I like not such canting hypocrites.

The poor beggar dies, partly from sickness, partly from want: But what a change follows; God's angels carry his soul to heaven directly.

You that are poor seek and get Jesus Christ, and you will be richer than the greatest king that ever lived. Christ will be with you in all your sorrows here; and his angels will wait about your poor bed to bear you presently to him whom you have loved when you die.

We see riches will not save from death: The rich man also died. Probably he had all the help medicine could give, and all the seeming love his friends could shew, but "he also died." The richest man on earth must die, do what he will, as well as the poorest; riches will not bribe death; and, oh! still less will they save from the second death of soul and body for ever. He was buried; possibly with great pomp and grandeur; but what read we next of him? "And in hell, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes." What did all profit him now his soul was lost? What will all your lusts, your beloved sins profit your poor soul if you go where he went? Oh, consider!

He lifted up his eyes, and what he saw must increase his misery: He saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom; he saw what he had lost for ever; lost, because he despised and slighted it. Thus the Scriptures tell us, that unbelievers shall be tormented day and night, for ever and ever, in the presence of God and of his angels. The sight of what they once despised shall fill their souls with double anguish; and as the Apocryphal writing says, "When they see it they shall be troubled with terrible fear, and shall be amazed at the strangeness of his salvation, so far beyond all that they looked for. And they, repenting and groaning for anguish of spirit, shall say within themselves, This was he whom we had sometimes in derision, and a proverb of reproach. We fools accounted his life madness; and his end to be without honour. How is he numbered among the children of God, and his lot is among the saints. Therefore have we erred from the way of truth, and the light of righteousness hath not shined unto us, and the sun of righteousness rose not upon us. We wearied ourselves in the way of wickedness and destruction, yea, we have gone through deserts where there lay no way; but as for the way of the Lord we have not known it. What hath pride profited us? Or what good hath riches, with our vaunting, brought us? All those things are passed away like a shadow, and as a post that hasteth by." (*Wisdom 5, 1, &c.*)

The truths of God's word have raised many a merry laugh here on earth, but in hell they raise a bitter cry. He asks but for one drop to cool but the extreme part of his tongue. You who never pray, see how you will one day cry. Think how extreme his anguish must be who could so earnestly ask that very person he once despised, but for one drop for one little part of his body! Oh! if a moment's ease for but so small a part could be so longed for, what an infinite degree of torment must his whole soul and body together sustain? If a night or two spent without sleep, in painful tossing to and fro, without rest and ease, be hard to be borne, what must that misery be which is without one moment's ease for any one part of body or soul for ever and ever? One would think the bare possibility were enough to make the most careless concerned, much more the certainty.

Read Abraham's answer, he had, what he thought the chief good of man in this life, all he wished for; for he cared nothing for his soul, and laughed

at godliness, and so a great gulph was for ever fixed. No coming from the bottomless pit when once thou art there; no release.

Well, he thinks then of his brethren; not out of love for them, for there is no love for God or man there; but knowing that those he had seduced by his example, and encouraged in unbelief, when they came to him his torment would be increased.

Let us think of this, such as have seduced others to unclean lusts, or to drunkenness, or have encouraged them by our example, and slighted godliness, and scorned such as profess it. Oh! let us consider, while there is a door of mercy even for the vilest of us in Jesus Christ, before we come to this place of torment, and meet with a fresh tormentor in every one whom we have been an occasion of ruin to.

Observe, he does not wish to be sent himself. Why? Perhaps because he was conscious he was a stranger to Christ, and though he felt the misery, he knew not the remedy. Perhaps because the sight of his own agonies might have driven his brethren distracted rather than have served to have brought them to Christ.

Memorable is the final answer he receives, "If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead."

The first thing that strikes us in this is, that the Scriptures are the only means to effect that change in the heart of a sinner without which it is impossible for him to be saved. What do those Scriptures teach you and me on the whole? They teach that there is a future state of bliss or woe. It appears Dives laughed at this; perhaps you do. He had not believed it, else why ask one to be sent to certify to his brethren that it was a fact?

Now where this is really believed, a man cannot be unconcerned about it; his heart must and will say, What shall I do?

They teach next, that we are, by the fall of Adam, all polluted and guilty, and condemned by the just and holy God, who cannot do amiss; "that we have erred and strayed from God's ways like lost sheep," and have no health in us. This we can but own to be true, and that, in consequence, we can no more do any work that is pleasing to God to save ourselves by, or to procure his favour, than a dead corpse can do the works of a living man. That God, in mercy, hath sent his Son, who by his death has satisfied God's justice; and, by his perfect obedience to God's law, has fulfilled all righteousness for us; and, in consequence, whosoever believeth on him shall never perish, but have everlasting life. That where this is believed in the heart a change will take place in the whole heart and life, and, from being servants of sin unto death, we shall become servants to God, having fruit unto holiness and the end everlasting life (*Rom. 6, 22*)

These are the truths the Bible and our church teach; and to confirm and illustrate them the whole Scriptures were written. Hence we may assert, that it is not believing such and such miracles were done that makes a man a Christian; but it is the embracing those truths which miracles were wrought to awaken men to the consideration of. For all these things are true, though no miracle had been wrought to confirm them to us; as it is true you and I must die, it is true you and I are sinners; and that Christ alone can save. Nay more, they would have been true though never revealed. But God in mercy revealed them, and in mercy has confirmed this revelation in such a manner as that nothing but malice or madness could resist or gainsay; but still we hold to this that these

truths are their own evidence; "Is not my word like as a fire? saith the Lord, and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?" And that miracles were only wrought to awaken men to consider these truths, to guard us against pretended revelations, and to confirm our weak faith. Paul was not converted from a hatred of Christ to a love for him by the outward miracle, else his companions had been converted too. It was the voice which said, "I am Jesus," which they heard not (*Acts 24, 14*) My sheep, says Christ, hear my voice.

We may next venture to assert, that the miracles by which God has borne witness to his truth are as much as in our situation we can have.

It is true you and I never saw the dead raised, the sick healed; but you may as well doubt there is such a place as London, because you have never seen it; or that there ever was such a place as Babylon. But suppose we had seen these works done; would not our lusts have prompted us to ascribe them to the devil or magic, as they were ascribed by some to? Might not they have been ascribed to natural causes; or might not we have been persuaded that our senses were deceived?

But we may venture to assert even more, that miracles, equal to any recorded, are now before our eyes. The predictions concerning Egypt, Babylon, Jerusalem, so wonderfully fulfilled; and the case of the Jews this day, are efforts of Divine Power, considered in all their circumstances, greater than any exertion of it upon inanimate matter could be. And we may see with our eyes the highest miracle of all, the change of a sinner's heart from a love of sin to a love of Christ and of holiness, which once he hated. And we can see this sneered and laughed at. If then the end for which all miracles were wrought is scorned, no wonder if the means to effect this are scorned likewise.

We may assert, that no evidence that could be asked, but either has been given, or is now before our eyes, to witness that the Bible is God's word, so full that a man must bid farewell to all common-sense who means to resist it, and assert roundly, as one once did, that "all fact is delusion, and that fire itself does not burn." So did one of the ablest and most inveterate enemies revelation ever had, pressed, as it may seem, with the load of its evidence, yet hating it, he fled to such a mad assertion as this.

Possibly Dives once might be of this opinion, but he felt that fire did burn when he cried, "I am tormented in this flame."

We may ask, what evidence would you have which God has not given? Would you have one to rise from the dead? Suppose this was granted, and, in the silent hours of the night, some one you have known were to come from the doleful regions of hell, in flames of fire, and tell you, in bitter cries, hell is no jest, sin is no jest, holiness is no jest, Christ is no jest, possibly the sight might destroy you. If it did not, it may be you would be much affected for a few days, or a few weeks; and your gay friends would probably persuade you it was all a delusion; for, they might say, who of us ever saw or heard of such a thing? Thus the cares, the business, and pleasures you have lived in, would, in all likelihood, wear away all thoughts of it, and in a year or two you would look back upon it as you would do on a dream. Have not many convictions worn off thus that were once heavy on your conscience? Have not the deaths of your friends affected you with good resolutions for a while, and then, by degrees, left you?

But suppose it had the effect Dives wished, that, alarmed and awakened, it caused you to break off from all your sinful courses and companions,

and drave you to prayer, reading God's word, and inquiring of such as you saw serious in these concerns, so as in the end to bring you truly to Jesus Christ, and a true conversion through him? I ask you next, what effect do you think it would have on others? You tell them solemnly what you had seen; how this lead you to read your Bible, and the necessity you saw of altering your life, &c. Would they credit you? What better claim on their credit have you than they have who have recorded the miracles of Christ? Would they not rather laugh at and despise you as mad? Would they not say, let us see one from the dead, as you have seen, and we will believe too? Suppose this was to be granted to one, and if to one, why not to all? It would then be a miracle no more. It would be as common as the sight of the sun, and affect men as little. I myself have known several persons, men of no seriousness, but who lived openly careless and ungodly lives; yet men too of credibility, and of courage, who have solemnly told me, that they had seen the appearances of their friends at the time of their dissolution. I do not assert they did see them, but they were persuaded they did; I mention it to prove that such impressions had no good effect, they lived as if there were no Bible, as if God were a liar, and as if there were no hell nor heaven after death.

Another great objection some make is, that priests support the Bible, because the Bible supports them. I grant the general history of the Jewish church proves that many of the clergy then acted, as too many of the clergy do now only because of temporal advantage: But I deny that they who preached Jesus Christ then, as well as they who now preach him, acted from such motives. Did Moses gain any temporal good? Did he not give up all the riches of Egypt; and esteem the reproach of Christ better than all? Did the Prophets who preached Christ, who wandered about in sheep-skins and goat-skins, afflicted, destitute, tormented; did they shew much priestcraft? Did Jesus, when on earth? Did his disciples after his death? And at this day, does a clergyman who is earnest for the souls of sinners, lives and preaches Jesus Christ, and asserts the truths of God's word and our church, does he shew much priestcraft, when he knows that he shall probably be hunted from curacy to curacy until he be driven, if possible, out of the church? Yet there are, at this day, blessed be God, above three hundred clergymen of this character; some of them of the first abilities, giving up all for Jesus Christ, and content to be accounted Methodists and mad. One, not longer than the last year, was discovered, of this character, who, with four children, had been sustained only on barley bread and water for some time: Is there any trace of priestcraft here?

The last objection I shall touch on is the seeming contradictions in the Bible. Some to philosophy so called; some to reason and fact.

In the beginning of this century many made themselves very merry when they read that Joshua bid the sun to stand still; when we find by philosophy the sun moves not about the earth, but the earth about the sun. Many a good joke passed on poor Moses as a bad philosopher, and, if so, a bad divine. But, on searching the Hebrew, it was found that the word Moses uses for the orb of the sun in Genesis (*chap. 1, 16*) is a very different one from what Joshua uses, which signifies the light that continually flows from the orb. Thus this mirth was spoiled.

Another seeming inconsistency to reason was where we read of men building a tower to reach to heaven (*Gen. 11, 4*) Now they said, this is wholly impossible that men in their senses could think of building such a

tower, in a plain too as Babel was, for how could it answer the purpose of saving from the force of such a deluge as overtopped by far the highest mountains. Here again the text, when looked to, only asserted, that men built a tower to the heavens, *i. e.* on whose top an altar might be built for the worship of the heavens.

I might mention many, for I have seen nearly three hundred objections and seeming contradictions, which, when known, have proved the greatest harmony instead of confusion. My way now is this: As I know the Bible was once a book I was wholly blind and averse to from beginning to end, and as, I trust, the Lord has given me to know somewhat of its worth and truth, though I know it but very little; so when any seeming difficulty is started, either by Satan, or his children, or my own unbelief, I ever come to this, God is wise, I am a fool; what I know not teach Thou me: And, if it be good for me, I am sure I shall know it in God's good time. If he sees good for me to be kept in ignorance of it, I know this is good too: It teaches me to be humble and trust him; and, as St. Augustine says, for what I know to be thankful; and to adore for what I find too deep for my nothingness to comprehend.

I know not whether you poor people will understand what I have here written: I hope you will, as I trust I have done it because I love your souls, and would not wish you (poor as you are here, and subject to many sorrows) to lose your only hope now in Christ, and to lose your soul for ever after you die.

You who have had the misfortune to imbibe these sad principles, consider what good you can ever expect in this life from them. All that you can hope for is that you may indulge your lusts without remorse. Suppose this is attained; will this be any advantage to you? Have your sins or mine improved our health, or our peace of mind? Have they not done quite the contrary to us? If we could have indulged them ten times more it had been so much the worse for us now. Will these principles bring any benefit to you from others? Are men so honest in their dealings as to need any restraint on their dishonest desires to be taken off? Are men so chaste, so temperate that they need to have some hindrances removed? Would you be glad to have your property stolen? Your children and your wives prostitutes? Your just dues withheld from you? And your life exposed to malice and revenge?—If you would, you take the surest means by endeavouring to blot out of your own mind, and out of the minds of others, the certainty of a future existence, and of a just and holy God. If you wish to be more miserable yourself here than you are: If you wish to rob the poor, the sick, the afflicted of their only refuge amid their miseries; and if you wish to rush on the vengeance of an affronted God, you take the surest method by encouraging these detested principles.

Oh! you poor, give not up your highest, your only privilege of being rich in faith, rich in Christ, whom the great and wise despise. If he have not their families to dwell in, nor his name suffered to be mentioned there in prayer and praises, oh! let him have yours. He was poor like you, despised like you; let this move you.

Learn that the faith which will save you is the gift of God. Dives thought that one coming from the dead could produce it in the heart; but none except the Holy Ghost can. Pray for God to give you his Holy Spirit, that you may know the things that belong to your peace before they be for ever hid from your eyes. Prize your Bible—read it—pray for God's Holy Spirit to teach it to you; for the natural man discerneth

not the things of the Spirit (2 Cor. 2, 14) How do we see this Scripture fulfilled before our eyes? For, after all, here is the cause of all the cavilling at the Bible; like a blind man who cavils at one who has seen the sun, because he cannot see it himself.

Do not murmur against the government you live under; but be thankful that the Gospel is permitted to be preached among us; and prove, by a quiet submission to what the Lord is pleased to suffer to come upon us, that you value Jesus Christ above all things.* The way to provoke God to remove this blessing is our not being enough thankful for it.

Avoid evil books and evil company as you would do poison: Make much of God's word, and of such as read and love it, and practise it. Pray with your families, and by yourself: Be honest in your dealings, and sober in your conduct: Be humble to your superiors, and kind to your equals. Thus you will adorn the doctrine of God your blessed Saviour, and many who now despise you, seeing your light which God has given you so to shine, may be led to enquire after, and, at last, to glorify your Father who is in heaven.

* If we knew but a thousandth part of the worth of Jesus Christ, we should think it enough to have him though (on our hands and knees) we begged our bread from door to door.



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